

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Preliminary Remarks

This English summary provides an overview of the main lines of development of Sasanian coinage covered by part 1. of the German version. It is intended to give the reader a general idea and has thus been kept brief. For more detailed discussion I have inserted references to the relevant chapters into the main body of the text. Part 2. of the German version, which deals with the individual kings, is not covered by this summary.

Technical Observations

In the period 309–531, the only regular die axis of Sasanian coins is 3^h. The single exception to this rule seems to be the Khuzistani mint X of Shapur III where 9^h appears to be the rule³. The production of copper coins tends to be considerably less careful than that of silver drachms, but for base metal issues, too, 3^h is canonical.

The number of die cracks rises steeply from the reign of Peroz onwards⁴, indicating that as a result of the increase in monetary production under that ruler, the dies were used until they literally fell to pieces. The number of repairs to dies⁵, interestingly enough, increases in direct proportion to the number of die cracks.

Together with the greater number of coins struck from damaged dies, other production errors also become more common. The most notable of these is the “dead” or “blind” spot⁶ which becomes an almost regular feature from the reign of Peroz onwards: about 50% of all drachms of every ruler from this king onwards display this peculiarity.

Among the most important and interesting phenomena are the alterations carried out on dies⁷. In some ideal cases, they can serve as irrefutable proof of the internal chronology developed here, as is for example the case with a Wahram IV drachm (no. A45). Here, the bust in the flames of reverse type 2 has been altered to the altar flames without bust of the chronologically later type 3.

Overstrikes are a very rare phenomenon⁸. Remarkably enough, the only instance of them being moderately common is during the reign of Shapur II, when 4th-century Roman copper coins were used as flans for Sasanian small change.

Hybrid die combinations⁹ occur with some frequency both at the turn of the 4th to the 5th as well as that of the 5th to the 6th century, clearly proving that old dies were not necessarily all destroyed or completely recut on death of a king.

Graffiti occur rarely, with more than the half of the twelve known examples in this volume dating to the 2nd reign of Kawad I¹⁰.

² For detailed statistics cp. 1.3.1.

³ Cp. 2.3.1.3.

⁴ Cp. 1.3.2.

⁵ Cp. 1.3.4.

⁶ Cp. 1.3.3.

⁷ Cp. 1.3.5.

⁸ Cp. 1.3.6.

⁹ Cp. 1.3.7.

¹⁰ Cp. 1.3.8.

Obverse Typology

It may be useful to emphasize a number of general thoughts which would seem to be beyond question. There can be no doubt that the king in real life wore his elaborate personal crown, which at least in the late Sasanian period was so heavy that it had to be suspended above the ruler's head¹¹, only on ceremonial occasions when he appeared in public, but not in everyday life in the palace nor when on campaigns. On the coins, however, the ruler is almost always depicted with his personal crown, and thus in full ceremonial garb. This shows that it was this aspect which the royal administration wanted to emphasize.

This does not mean, however, that the depiction of the ruler is wholly static. On all coins from Shapur II to Kawad I both the diadem ribbons as well as the secondary ribbons are depicted not hanging down, but pointing upwards. Thus, one should not imagine that the ruler is seated in a closed room such as an audience hall, but rather in the open, perhaps on horseback as Ardashir I is shown on his rock reliefs. The depiction of the ribbons lends the royal portrait a certain dynamism, combining the ceremonial aspect of the crown depiction with the energetic element of the king as warrior or hunter.

In general, the obverse is reserved for the King of Kings¹². The only exception in this period is the addition of a second, smaller bust during the reigns of Shapur III and Zamasp¹³. The royal bust almost always faces right. Fronting busts occur on gold coins of Wahram IV, Peroz, Walkash and the second reign of Kawad I. On some copper coins struck at the mint of Sakastan under Shapur II the king is shown facing left¹⁴.

When examining the obverse portraits in more detail, the first thing one notices is the individual crown. Precursors can be found as early as Parthian times as well as on the coin portraits in Fars, the native province of Ardashir I, and in the Elymais, but the most elaborate examples of individual Iranian crowns are attested in the Sasanian coin series, the only source which provides full and accurate information on the identification of each single ruler.

The most important feature of the crowns from Shapur II to Kawad I is a mural element which is absent only from those of Ardashir II and Shapur III. It has been generally assumed that this mural element alludes to the main Zoroastrian god Ahuramazda. It should be emphasized, however, that this god is always depicted with three mural elements when seen in profile, so that the crowns of Yazdgerd I or Kawad I, for example, are not a direct match with the god's crown. Nonetheless, there is no reason to doubt the connection between the mural element and Ahuramazda. The wings of Wahram IV and Peroz most likely refer to Verethragna, god of victory, while the arcaded crown of Shapur III could be connected with Anahita. In general, the repertoire of divine attributes is rather limited.

Under Shapur II, possibly under Shapur III, and under Wahram IV and Yazdgerd I the ruler is depicted without his individual crown, being shown instead with a curled coiffure¹⁵. In the case of Wahram IV and Yazdgerd I, however, the most prominent elements of the crown – a wing and a crescent respectively – are added. Except for a number of "Kabul" mint coppers (no. 257, A27), this special obverse type can be found only on light dinars¹⁶.

Leaving the sphere of the crowns themselves to take a broader look at the obverse depictions, steady developments can be observed, with almost every king adding new elements or new ways

¹¹ Cp. 1.4.1.1.2.

¹² Cp. 1.4.1.

¹³ Cp. 2.3.1.1.1. and 2.12.1.1.1.

¹⁴ Cp. 1.4.1.2.

¹⁵ Cp. 1.4.1.1.

¹⁶ Cp. 1.5.1.

Mural crowns without astral symbols		
 Shapur II		
Mural crowns with astral symbols		
 Yazdgerd I	 Peroz/1st crown	
 Wahram V.	 Zamasp	
 Yazdgerd II	 Walkash	
 Peroz/2nd crown	 Kawad I/1st reign	 Kawad I/2nd reign
Composite mural crowns without astral symbols		
 Wahram IV		
Composite mural crowns with astral symbols		
 Peroz/3rd crown		
Capped crowns		
 Ardashir II		
Arcaded crowns		
 Shapur III		

Tab. 1. Crowns

of depiction. On the earliest issues of Shapur II (Type Ia), the upper ribbons – as they have been termed by Göbl – are missing¹⁷. With the introduction of Type Ib1, these ribbons appear and are then present on all future Sasanian coins. A second change that takes place during Shapur's reign is the way the korymbos is shown: On type Ia coins, it is depicted as a hemisphere, commencing directly above the diadem. On type Ib1 issues, however, it is clearly separated from the crown cap; while this is not depicted under Shapur II, it is clearly recognisable on the coins of his successors, e.g. Ardashir II or Wahram IV.

Despite the short duration of his reign, Ardashir II introduces a very important innovation¹⁸: For the first time the diadem ribbons start below, and not, as earlier, above the bundle of hair at the nape of the ruler's neck. It is true that this depiction was used on a unique double dinar of Ohrmazd II¹⁹ and at mint III of Shapur II²⁰, as well as on other stray specimens²¹. Only under Ardashir II, however, did this manner of depicting the diadem ribbons become common at a number of different mints²². Under Shapur III and Wahram IV, variations in the rendering of the upper ribbons can be found²³: Until the reign of the former, both ribbons always pointed to the left. From Shapur III to Wahram IV, one ribbon is shown pointing to the left, the other one to the right²⁴. Under both these rulers, this depiction is the rule in the most important production group which I have called "Western Group" in the case of Shapur III, and which consists of AS, BBA, KL and other mints under Wahram IV. Yazdgerd I, however, returns to the earlier placement of the ribbons, with a few exceptions from Eastern mints²⁵. Another innovation which was not to last is the introduction of floral elements below the ruler's bust at the end of the reign of Wahram IV²⁶. No concrete explanation can be given for this addition which certainly represents floral elements, and not flames, despite parallels on Sasanian silverware and Hunnic coin issues. They become a usual feature of most issues from Yazdgerd I to Yazdgerd II, but with Peroz their use is discontinued, never to be resumed again on Sasanian coins. Of much greater impact is the introduction by Yazdgerd I of a crescent above the ruler's forehead²⁷. After a short hiatus, it is employed once again under Peroz²⁸ and becomes canonical with the second reign of Kawad I, being absent only under Ardashir III and, naturally, under Buran. This crescent is most likely connected with the astral aspects of Sasanian kingship, but this is a matter of debate²⁹. The successor of Yazdgerd I, Wahram V, places a crescent between crown cap (which however is not visible) and korymbos³⁰. This depiction, too, is to remain in use until the end of Sasanian-style coinage. The next king who strongly influences obverse typology is Peroz with his third crown. First of all, he places the wings of Verethragna above the crown cap. This propagandistic depiction comes into use once again with the second reign of Khusro II³¹ and is the main crown type

¹⁷ Cp. 2.1.1.1.1.

¹⁸ Cp. 2.2.1.1.1.

¹⁹ Cp. Göbl 1971, pl. 5, 80.

²⁰ Cp. 2.1.1.3.

²¹ Cp. no 252–254.

²² Cp. 2.2.1.3.

²³ Cp. 2.3.1.1.1. and 2.4.1.1.1.

²⁴ Cp. 2.3.1.1.1. and 2.4.1.1.1.

²⁵ Cp. 2.5.1.1.1.

²⁶ Cp. 1.4.1.1.

²⁷ Cp. 2.5.1.1.1.

²⁸ Cp. 2.9.1.1.1.

²⁹ Cp. 1.4.1.3.

³⁰ Cp. 2.6.1.1.1.

³¹ Cp. Göbl 1971, p. 53.

in the Late Sasanian period. A second typological change connected with Peroz's third crown is the depiction of the diadem ribbons: from now on, they are shown on both sides of the ruler's bust, pointing upwards³². Despite the fact that Peroz was no ruler who met a lucky end, one can clearly see that the typological innovations made by kings who lost their throne as a result of internal struggles were not accepted: both the shoulder flame of Walkash and the double crescent between crown cap and korymbos of Zamasp³³ remain merely episodes with no impact on the further development of Sasanian typology. Things are different with Kawad I. During his first reign he introduces a star as an astral symbol in the left obverse field, to which a second one in the right field is added from year 19 of Kawad's second reign onwards³⁴. As regards the upper ribbons, Kawad changes their form in his 13th regnal year. While they were previously mostly shown as a small row of dots, from now on they are broad and ribbed³⁵. Interestingly enough, while the astral symbols both within the field as well as outside the rim remain in use under all of Kawad's successors, the depiction of the upper ribbons is discontinued with the beginning of Khusro I's reign³⁶.

			
Shapur II/early	Shapur II/late	Ardashir II	Wahram IV
			
Yazdgerd I	Wahram V	Peroz/late	Kawad I / 2 nd reign

Tab. 2. Main lines of typological development

This short overview proves, I hope, that Sasanian obverse typology is no way static. The same applies, at a somewhat slower pace of progression, to the obverse legends³⁷: under Shapur II, the intended formula employed from the reign of Ohrmazd I onwards is used, in this case: *mzdysn bgy šhpwhly MLKAn MLKA 'yr'n W 'nyr'n MNW ctry MN yzd'n, mazdēsn bay Šābuhr šāhān šāh Ērān ud Anērān kē čīhr az yazdān* ("the Mazda-worshipping divine Shapur, King of Kings of the Iranians and Non-Iranians, whose descent is from the gods"). Apart from the ideogram ZY placed between the royal name and the title *MLKAn MLKA* on Western-style issues

³² Cp. 2.9.1.1.1.

³³ Cp. 1.4.1.1. and 2.12.1.1.1.

³⁴ Cp. 1.4.1.3.

³⁵ Cp. 2.13.1.1.1.

³⁶ Cp. Göbl 1971, pl. 12, 194–198.

³⁷ Cp. 1.4.1.4.

of Shapur III and Wahram IV, the first major change is the introduction of the epithet *l'mšthly*, *rāmšahr* (“joy of the empire”) under Yazdgerd I which can be found well into the reign of Yazdgerd II. It is under this king that a considerable change took place with the introduction of the mythic title *kdy*, *kay* (“king, ruler”) inserted between *mzdysn bgy* and the ruler’s name. The elements which used to follow the king’s name (*MLKAn MLKA ’yr’n W ’nyr’n MNW ctry MN yzd’n*) cannot be observed on any of Yazdgerd’s coins. This does not necessarily mean that the official royal titles were changed that drastically: under Yazdgerd’s successor Peroz, a few drachms still bear the traditional royal title *MLKAn MLKA* (*legend 2*). Together with the Greek translation of the titles of Khusro I in which the expressions “King of Kings” as well as “whose descent is from the gods” continue to occur³⁸, this proves that the older elements were still known, and might have been used officially. It is thus very difficult to conclude on the basis of the titles as they appear on the coins that changes in Sasanian royal ideology took place³⁹. Walkash introduces a new element, *hwkd* or *hwkl*, which might stand either for *hukay* (“the good king”) or – less likely – for *hukardār* (“beneficent”). During the first reign of Kawad I and under Zamasp, only the ruler’s name can be found on the coins. In his 16th regnal year, Kawad adds the phrase *’pzwny*, *abzōn*, “may he prosper”. The coin legends in the early 6th century thus have hardly anything at all in common with those of the early 4th century. Once again, the overall picture is not static, but on the contrary, one of steady evolution.

Two typical features of Late Sasanian coinage can be observed for the first time in the period covered here. The first is the addition of astral symbols outside the rim⁴⁰. They make their first appearance during the reign of Shapur II in the form of a crescent at 5^h, 7^h and 12^h (types Ib4 and Ib5). After an interval of some 100 years, Kawad I once again employs symbols outside the border. An important new discovery (no. **N5**) has a *khwarrah*-symbol with the same interval of 120° as under Shapur II, thus implying that Kawad I was influenced by that ruler. Interestingly enough, these two different symbols were used only on small copper coins. From the 13th regnal year of Kawad I onwards⁴¹, a star and a crescent become canonical for the drachm coinage, but now they are placed at 3^h, 6^h und 9^h, thus at a 90° interval. The use of the *khwarrah*-symbol under Kawad I can be used as an argument that both the crescent as well as the combination of star and crescent should be seen in the context of royal ideology and propaganda and thus belong to the astral aspects of the Sasanian royalty.

Reverse Typology

The basic reverse image is the Zoroastrian fire altar⁴². The base of the altar initially consisted of two elements, increased to three in connection with the introduction of type four. The altar shaft is almost exclusively cylindrical and, from reverse type 2 of Shapur II onwards, considerably smaller than the altar base. To the left and the right, ribbed diadem ribbons join the shaft. The upper part consists mostly of three or four elements. Above it, the altar flames are shown, the representation of which varies considerably. Under Shapur II, they are shown as a series of strokes resembling the letter “S”. From Wahram IV onwards, they are mostly depicted with four rows of four, three, two and one stroke respectively⁴³.

³⁸ Menander Protector, *de legationibus* I, 176.

³⁹ Examples are Morony 1997 and Daryaee 2002. The interpretations of both these authors are based on a far too limited knowledge of Sasanian numismatics.

⁴⁰ Cp. 1.4.1.3.

⁴¹ Cp. 2.13.1.1.2.

⁴² Cp. 1.4.2.1.

⁴³ Details on the depiction of the altar flames are provided in the catalogue (3.).

The main types employed in the period covered here are as follows⁴⁴:

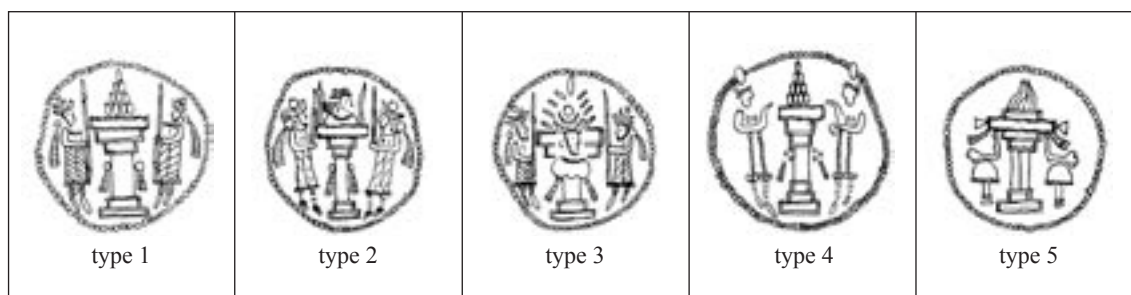
Type 1: Fire altar with attendants holding barsom bundles

Type 2: Fire altar with attendants holding barsom bundles and bust in the flames

Type 3: Fire altar with attendants holding barsom bundles and bust in front of the upper part of the altar

Type 4: Fire altar with attendants extending their right hands towards the altar

Type 5: Fire altar without attendants



Tab. 3. Basic reverse types

The first of these basic types was introduced by Shapur I and continued to be used until the reign of Yazdgerd II. At the very beginning of the reign of Shapur II (type 1a1), the crowns of the attendant figure are depicted differently from each other, the one on the left having a korymbos while that on the right does not. Apparently, the left-hand figure represents the king, while that on the right depicts the god Ahuramazda⁴⁵. From type 1a2 of Shapur II onwards, the crowns of both reverse figures are shown in exactly the same way, thus implying that both attendants represent the king. As is the rule from Narseh onwards⁴⁶, the attendants face the altar.

Type 2 showing a bust in the altar flames was introduced by Ohrmazd II and dominates the later coinage of Shapur II. It was used also by Ardashir II, although only at two mints, and by Shapur III across his empire, as well as in the first half of the reign of Wahram IV. The last attestations come from the reign of Yazdgerd I, but it is uncertain whether these were part of official coin production. It is most likely that the bust in the flames represents the King of Kings, and that this type in general emphasizes the military component of Sasanian kingship.

In the case of type 3, it is certain on account of the form of the crown that the bust in front of the altar represents the king – in this case, Wahram V, who introduced this type. Once again, a connection with the military aspects of the king's office is possible. It is indicated in the sources that Wahram V was very closely associated with the Adur-i Gushnasp⁴⁷, the fire of the warriors, and thus this reverse type might allude to this fire temple. After Wahram V, this reverse type is employed only by Walkash.

Type 4 is introduced at the very beginning of the reign of Yazdgerd II and becomes the only drachm reverse from Peroz – with the single exception of Walkash – until the death of Kawad I. Here, the attendants do not hold barsom bundles, but extend their right hands towards the altar in a gesture of adoration. I cannot tell what religious differences exist between type 1 and type 4.

⁴⁴ Cp. 1.4.2.1.

⁴⁵ Cp. 2.1.1.1.2.

⁴⁶ Cp. Göbl 1971, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Cp. 2.6.2.

Whereas the first four types were used as normal reverses for the regular coinage, type 5 has a different character. It represents the reverse type of Ardashir I and was used for the first time after his death under Shapur II. It is attested for every ruler until the reign of Yazdgerd I, but mostly on gold issues and silver fractions. Only in the case of Shapur II and Wahram IV are drachms featuring this depiction found, and even then only in limited numbers. This implies that type five was a ceremonial type which was perhaps connected with dynastic celebrations, possibly referring to the individual kings' fires.

Special types can be found for most kings dealt with here⁴⁸, albeit only in very small numbers. They are attested mostly on gold coins, 1/6drachms and copper issues. In the case of precious metal coinage, one can assume that these special type coins were struck for festive occasions. 1/6drachms featuring the *khwarrah*-symbol (cp. Shapur III, no. **29**, **A17**; Yazdgerd I, **A70**) might have been distributed, e.g. in the course of the coronation ceremony to the populace. In the case of copper coins, the central authorities might have granted the local mints the right to issue their own local types, as can be observed e.g. in the base metal issues from Marw⁴⁹.

Multiple rims⁵⁰ – attested so far for Shapur II, Yazdgerd I and II as well as Walkash⁵¹ – occur only on bronze coins until the reign of Kawad I. In this ruler's 33rd regnal year, a double rim was introduced in the drachm coinage. No astral symbols outside the rim are attested in the period covered by this volume.

The reverse legends⁵² follow the pattern introduced by Ardashir I, thus *NWRA ZY* plus king's name ("Fire of ..."). Normally, these two elements are placed at 3^h and 9^h respectively. Under Shapur III, the ideogram *NWRA* is replaced by the Pehlevi-word *twly* (*ādur*, "fire"). Under Wahram IV and Yazdgerd I the forms 'king's name plus *MLKA* ("king")' as well as 'king's name plus *l'st* (*rāst*, "just")' can also be found. Wahram V uses the word *štdy* (most likely a distorted form of *štr'd'l*, "ruler") on some rare drachms (cp. no **A25**). Since from his reign onwards the mint signature is almost always found at 3^h, the legends become much shorter. Yazdgerd II employs the king's name or *nwky* (*nōk*, "new"). Under Peroz, either a monogram combining the "M" of *MLKA* and the "P" of *pylwcy* or only the ruler's name are used. The latter form of reverse legend is also encountered under Walkash and in Kawad's first reign. With the canonical introduction of regnal years at 9^h under Zamasp, the usual reverse legends disappear, apart from some special type gold and copper issues from the second reign of Kawad I.

Additional marks⁵³ are attested at the beginning of the reign of Shapur II, under Yazdgerd I and from Peroz onwards. In the case of Yazdgerd I it is clear – especially on the basis of the evidence of die alterations – that there is a chronological sequence of these marks which consist of various combinations of crescents and dots. In the 2nd regnal year of Peroz, a star to the left and a crescent to the right of the altar flames become canonical.

Dates⁵⁴ were used for the first time in Sasanian monetary history in the second regnal year of Peroz⁵⁵, but their employment ended with this king's 7th regnal year. Zamasp⁵⁶, however, once again put dates on his coins, and they were to become a canonical feature of Sasanian coins.

⁴⁸ Cp. 1.4.2.1.

⁴⁹ Cp. 2.15.

⁵⁰ Cp. 1.4.2.2.

⁵¹ The double rim on a drachm of Walkash (no **A5**) might be explained by a die engraver's error.

⁵² Cp. 1.4.2.3.

⁵³ Cp. 1.4.2.4.

⁵⁴ Cp. 1.4.2.5. Drawings of the dates can be found in the catalogue.

⁵⁵ Cp. 2.9.1.1.2.

⁵⁶ Cp. 2.12.1.1.2.

Denominations

At a first glance, it would seem that the Sasanians issued virtually nothing except drachms and that the monetary system of the empire was thus monometallic. However, this is not the case, as a look at the preponderance of copper coins from archaeological excavations shows⁵⁷. Upon closer examination, it is evident that a well-designed system of various metals and denominations was in use which was not at all static but subject to considerable changes from the emergence to the fall of the dynasty. During the period dealt with here, however, the number of different denominations is reduced. Nonetheless, the basic features – coin issues in gold, silver, and bronze – remain the same.

Gold coins were struck for ceremonial purposes and not for use in normal monetary circulation. This can be learned from the small number of surviving specimens, as well as from the often special typology on both obverse and reverse⁵⁸.

As far as metrology is concerned, an important change was effected by Shapur II. Prior to his rule, the weight of the standard gold coin, i.e., the dinar, was about 7.20 g⁵⁹. Shapur II introduced a new coin, weighing only 4.20 g⁶⁰. At a first glance, one might think that these issues correspond the Roman solidus of 4.5 g, but the Sasanian coins are invariably lighter than the Late Roman standard gold denomination. I believe this is due to the fact that the dinars were based on a different siliqua standard, namely the Syrian siliqua of 0.212 g, 20 of which equalled the weight of one light dinar. At first these new light-weight dinars were marked by the absence of the crown on the obverse. Until the reign of Wahram V, both the heavy and the light dinar occur alongside each other, but from the accession of Yazdgerd II onwards, only light-weight dinars were struck. Under Peroz, it seems that once again a reduced gold coin of 18 siliquae was issued⁶¹ alongside the 20 siliquae dinars.

Interestingly enough, a small number of imitations of Roman solidi from the Humeima Hoard also have a weight of *c.* 4.25 g and thus conform to the standard of the Sasanian dinar, and not to that of the solidus itself. Since these coins were found together with drachms of Yazdgerd I, I believe that they were issued by a Persian-style mint, possibly in Hira, the Lakhmid capital⁶².

Due to the very small numbers of specimens, the metrology of the dinar fractions⁶³ remains obscure. It appears as if two different denominations were struck, namely a third dinar, attested for Wahram IV, Yazdgerd I and Peroz, and a 1/6dinar which can be found in almost every reign from Shapur II to Kawad's second reign, except for that of Wahram V and Zamasp. The latter is the only king dealt with here for whom no gold coins at all have turned up so far. The last known Sasanian gold fraction dates from the 30th regnal year of Kawad I (no A7).

Apart from Eastern issues from Marw and Herat under Shapur II, no mint indications were used on gold coins until the reign of Yazdgerd II. After Peroz, the mint AY is the most prominent production place for gold issues⁶⁴.

As stated above, the number of surviving gold coins is very low: e.g. for Wahram V, there are only three official gold issues known to me. More substantial gold coinages are encountered only under Shapur II and Peroz⁶⁵. In the case of Shapur II, most dinars come from Eastern mints,

⁵⁷ Cp. 1.6.2.2. with *tab.* 55.

⁵⁸ Cp. 1.5.1.

⁵⁹ Cp. 1.5.1. with *tab.* 26.

⁶⁰ Cp. 1.5.1. with *tab.* 26.

⁶¹ Cp. 1.5.1.

⁶² Cp. 2.15.

⁶³ Cp. 1.5.1.

⁶⁴ Cp. 1.5.1.

⁶⁵ Cp. 2.1.1.2.1. and 2.9.1.2.1.

especially Marw, and should certainly be seen in connection with the king's activities in the East, which were directed against the Kushan whose main denomination was the dinar. Under Peroz, the rather large number of surviving dinars might be explained by the king's attempts to buy the loyalty of the nobility after his first crushing defeat by the Hephthalites.

The silver drachm is by far the most common Sasanian coin⁶⁶. Apart from it, the only other silver fraction which survived until the reign of Shapur II is the 1/6drachm⁶⁷. Its small numbers, the often special typology as well as the very low standard of weight control show that the 1/6drachm was mainly used as a celebrative coin, and – like the gold coins – not intended for normal monetary circulation. There is no sound evidence to assume that more than this one fractional denomination existed in the 4th and 5th centuries. The last known 1/6drachms were issued before the 33rd year of Kawad I's reign⁶⁸.

The drachm coinage saw some minor yet significant changes during the period from Shapur II to Kawad I⁶⁹. Let me start with the weights standard. From Shapur II to Yazdgerd II, as far as statistical data, mainly from coin hoards, is available, it seems that the intended weight of the drachm was about 4.25 g. It seems to me that the basic unit of reckoning was, as in the case of the dinar, the Syrian siliqua. Thus, one drachm equalled 20 carats, the same weight as that of the reduced dinar. Under Peroz, the weight was slightly reduced, apparently by 1/4 siliqua.

Another important observation is the steep increase in drachm production from Peroz onwards. The number of coins per year – based on the museum collections (*Tab. 52*) – together with technical peculiarities such as the much higher number of coins with die cracks⁷⁰ from Peroz onwards, show that from then on, a considerably larger number of drachms were struck.

Interestingly enough, at the same time weight control was improved. Whereas before Peroz even in hoards the number of coins deviating from the ideal weight of 4.25 g is fairly high, this spectrum becomes much narrower from the reign of this king onwards. It seems that beginning with Peroz the drachms were issued *al pezzo*, and not, as before, *al marco*⁷¹.

The purity of the drachms was very high, with no indications that a reduction of silver content took place. However, on the basis of the data from the analysis of the Vienna collection, no distinction between the silver sources of different mints can as yet be made⁷².

In the case of copper coins⁷³, no reliable reconstruction of denominations and weight standards can be produced as long as there is no reliably extensive material basis. Even then, the picture that emerges is not always clear⁷⁴.

In general, except for a small number of large coppers issued by Shapur II at Eastern mints such as Sakastan and “Kabul”⁷⁵, most copper coins are of small module and weight⁷⁶. Mint signatures were introduced only slowly, with Peroz being the first king to issue only signed copper apart from the mint at Marw. In any case, it is often impossible to make out the small and carelessly engraved mint indications⁷⁷. Special reverse types are a common phenomenon, proving that individual mints were to some extent free to choose designs of their own.

⁶⁶ Cp. 1.1.2.

⁶⁷ Cp. 1.5.2.

⁶⁸ Cp. 2.13.1.2.2.

⁶⁹ Cp. 1.5.2.

⁷⁰ Cp. 1.3.2.

⁷¹ Cp. 1.5.2.

⁷² Cp. 1.9.

⁷³ Cp. 1.5.3.

⁷⁴ Cp. 1.5.3. with *tab. 49* for the Shapur II coins from Marw. No clear peak can be made out here.

⁷⁵ Cp. 2.1.1.2.3.

⁷⁶ Cp. 1.5.3.

⁷⁷ And sometimes not even the ruler with certainty: Cp. 3.13. for copper coins which could not be attributed to specific reigns.

In general, neither the question of the denominational system nor of the mint locations can be solved satisfactorily for the time being.

Lead objects which imitate the typology of copper coins occur (cp. Shapur II, no. **308**; Wahram IV, no. **A62**, **A64**), in particular under Shapur II. It appears that they were used as local petty coinage⁷⁸, and can thus be classified as coins.

Mint Localisations

In the field of Sasanian numismatics, the localisation of the mints is one of the biggest problems of all. One is confronted with two different situations within the chronological frame of this study: From Shapur II to Yazdgerd I and also under Yazdgerd II, mint signatures are either not given at all, or are not present on all coins. Under Wahram V and from Peroz to Kawad I, all drachms bear mint indications.

Let me start with the first group. This material can only be treated by means of stylistic analysis. First of all, it is necessary to try to distinguish different stylistic groups, and then to attribute every coin to one of these groups⁷⁹. Once a reliable arrangement of the entire material according to style has been established, the stylistic groups of different rulers must be compared and matches between different reigns found. In an ideal case – as shown below in *fig. 1* – it is possible to link unsigned with signed coins and thus safely localise the entire stylistic group. In the example below, the unsigned drachms of Ardashir II (no. **A15**) and Shapur III (no. **21**) can be attributed to the ART mint on the evidence of a Wahram IV (no. **A15**) of exactly the same style, which incidentally is unique.



Fig. 1. Mint attribution of unsigned issues with the help of style

However, it is not always possible to find signed coins, and thus not all stylistic groups can be localised. General stylistic criteria allow at least a distinction between “Western” and “Eastern” style, “Eastern” here meaning Khorassan and Gurgan. The typical features of these two regions are generally speaking broad flans, often minor typological details as well as a very specific treatment of the portraits⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ Cp. 1.5.4.

⁷⁹ Cp. 1.2.

⁸⁰ Cp. e.g. 2.4.1.3.

If a mint indication is given, this does not mean that the mint can be easily localised. The first mint signatures are attested as early as the reign of Shapur I⁸¹. However, until the reign of Wahram IV, the use of mint indications is only sporadic and mostly limited to Eastern mints such as Marw. Wahram IV also introduced the general use of mint signatures, typically consisting of two or three letters, into the western territories of the Sasanian realm, although unsigned drachms were issued well into the reign of Yazdgerd II. Although considerable progress has been achieved so far, in several cases no universally accepted interpretation of each single mint has as yet been worked out.

The correct reading of most signatures is firmly established nowadays⁸². However, where localisation is concerned, consensus is far less common. Instead of covering each and every individual signature here⁸³, I will concentrate on the methods. Since the equation of mint signatures is primarily a numismatic problem, the numismatic material necessarily constitutes the most important source.

The first point to be taken into account is style. From the reign of Wahram IV onwards, the same stylistic criteria can be observed at various mints, which shows that in some cases the dies were produced centrally for more than one mint⁸⁴. If a mint signature displays the same style which is attested otherwise only in one single region, this is a strong argument for localising this signature there, too. The most important case of a stylistic attribution of this type is the WH mint. Formerly, it was mostly thought to refer to Weh-Ardashir, a part of the city complex of Ctesiphon⁸⁵. However, the style of WH is the same as that of the two Khuzistani mints AWH and AYL under Wahram IV (cp. *fig. 2*). Thus, it is almost certain that WH does not stand for Weh-Ardashir in Asuristan, but rather a city in Khuzistan, the most plausible candidate being Weh-Andiyok-Shapur.



Fig. 2. Localisation of mint signatures with the help of style under Wahram IV

⁸¹ Alram/Gyselen 2003, no. A51.

⁸² Cp. 1.6.2.1.

⁸³ A list of all signatures attested in this volume and their localisations can be found in 1.6.2.2.

⁸⁴ Cp. 1.6.1.1.

⁸⁵ Cp. 1.6.2.2. under WH.

Typology must also be taken into account in dealing with the localisation of mints. A further argument for the localisation of WH in Khuzistan is the fact that the dinars of Yazdgerd II showing the special obverse type Ic2 come from AW, AY, and once again from WH, whereas this type is not encountered in any other mint in any other region⁸⁶.

Historical circumstances should also be taken into account. The best example of this is the question of what GW stands for. The fact that under Walkash, when all Khorassan was lost due to the defeat of Peroz by the Hephthalites in 484⁸⁷, the coin output of GW suddenly increases dramatically⁸⁸ is a cogent argument for equating that signature with Gurgan. It is only natural that after the loss of Khorassan Gurgan formed the new border region in the East of the Sasanian empire where – whether for tributes or payments to the soldiers guarding the border – the need for coins increased considerably.

The case of GW is even more complicated. It can be proved that two different mints used the signature GW. The first one is attested under Yazdgerd I in the context of the central die production at Fars⁸⁹. One drachm has on the obverse the signature GW, and on the reverse the full mint name GWDMY (no. A20). This coin must originate from a mint in Fars. At the end of the reign of Yazdgerd I a totally different style can be observed in connection with the signature GW, which is however not yet proof that GW refers to different location. This proof is provided by a drachm of Wahram V (no. A19) which bears the signature GWL and thus cannot be equated with GWDMY, belonging as it does to Gurgan.

Another interesting case is the question of which Marw issues in the 5th century are Sasanian originals, and which are imitations. Because of the stylistic similarity of a fairly large group of gold, silver and copper issues from Ardashir II to Wahram V, I believe that those Wahram V drachms which have so far been labelled imitations are in fact official products from the Sasanian mint at Marw⁹⁰.

The evidence of Sasanian administrative bullae is also of great importance, but this type of source should be taken into consideration only after full use has been made of the numismatic material.

Imitations

The impact of Sasanian coin typology on the so-called “Iranian Huns” cannot be overestimated⁹¹. Apart from their issues, there are a few coins, mostly drachms, which do not conform to the official style but which do not fit into the Hunnic series either⁹². Some of these might have been produced by ancient coin forgers in Iran.

Modern Forgeries

Modern forgeries of Sasanian coins are not very common⁹³. Casts can easily be distinguished, whereas in the case of struck coins – mostly dinars – a clear distinction between genuine and false can be difficult to establish in certain special cases⁹⁴.

⁸⁶ Cp. 2.7.1.1.1.

⁸⁷ Cp. 2.9.2.

⁸⁸ Cp. 1.6.3.2. with *tab.* 65.

⁸⁹ Cp. 2.5.1.3.

⁹⁰ Cp. 2.14.

⁹¹ Cp Göbl 1967.

⁹² Cp. 1.7.

⁹³ Cp. 1.8.

⁹⁴ Cp. no. 310 of Shapur II, believed to be a modern forgery by Göbl 1971, pl. 16, 244 f., but now proved to be genuine due to the discovery of another such coin during archaeological excavations in Georgia, cp. Tsotselia 2003, p. 36.

